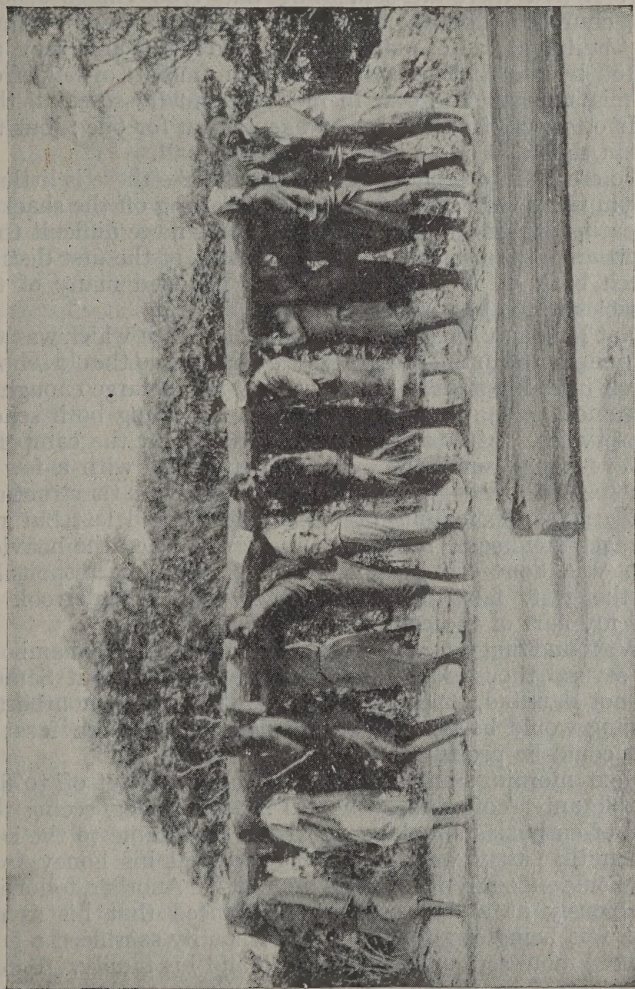


The Cost of a Church in Africa

By the Rev. W. J. W. Rampley, Kenya Colony



Willing Helpers in Church Building, East Africa

The Cost of a Church in Africa

IN Kenya there are something like 1700 village school-churches, dotted about in various places. These buildings are of many shapes and sizes, and they are erected by the Africans with a certain amount of help from the missionary. The cost in money is small—so small that a gift of 7s. 6d. from a friend was sufficient for one ; but the cost in time and effort is by no means small.

To erect an out-school in a district where there is little or no sympathy with those desirous of throwing off the shackles of heathenism and to live for Christ is far more difficult than it appears on the surface. The rebuilding of the first district church built at Kabare in 1920 has revealed many of the obstacles which have to be faced.

Not long ago I visited an out-school church which was the first one erected in the Kabare district, and found the old school-church in a dilapidated state, and not nearly large enough to accommodate the increasing numbers attending both school and services. After a long discussion around the camp fire one evening, Samuel the evangelist, together with a few of his helpers, decided—providing I would help with the structure, foundations, the making of brick moulds, and last but not least, get them some meat from the plains when the heaviest work was done—that they would be entirely responsible for the rest, financially and otherwise. I undertook to fulfil my part of the contract.

We found that seventy-five fairly large trees, 400 bamboos, and several thousand bricks would be needed ; but Samuel was not daunted, and assured me that in three months the building would be nearing completion, if only the feast of meat could be promised.

Next morning Samuel and three other men set off to find suitable ant-proof trees. One old heathen elder, seeing this band of enthusiasts looking up at his tree, came to the conclusion that they were conspiring to steal his honey from a hive suspended from one of its branches. Another, following suspiciously at a distance, was convinced that his sacred grove was being cut down. A third hastily sacrificed a goat to avoid more serious results to him and his family. Before a single tree could be touched, sometimes an hour had to be spent with the owner regarding the price, etc.

However, after two weary weeks, seventy-five suitable trees were felled with native axes, many of the latter perishing in the using. The trees had then to be carried one, two, or three miles to the spot where the church was to be built. The next thing was to get the 400 bamboos, and these had to be transported a distance of seven miles.

On January 15 all was ready, and at 6 a.m. Samuel was blowing his goat's horn for early prayers and a start on the building. After two days' strenuous work, the structure was up, and the third day saw the roof a complete net-work, ready to be thatched. From early morning till sunset the women and girls toiled under the heat of a burning sun to get the necessary grass for the roof. Like bees they brought their burdens home, the men did the thatching, and by February 20 the whole roof was finished.

Samuel was more than pleased with what God had enabled him and his little band to accomplish, and came over to say that they were ready for the brick-moulds. After searching in every hole and corner, the only suitable material discovered for such a purpose was a shelf in our bathroom. Knowing something of the sacrifices already made by Samuel and his people, my wife readily consented to its removal.

With a beaming face, Samuel returned to make a start on the bricks. He soon came back, this time to ascertain when it would be possible to fulfil the most important part of the contract—the providing of meat. As the heavy rains were due in a few days, my wife and I decided to go off to the plains with as little delay as possible.

We started on March 19. After pitching camp we bagged a small buck, sufficient only for the evening meal. While chatting round the camp fire, a messenger came from Samuel to say that no fewer than fifty others would join us in the morning. This was serious, and not being an expert hunter, I called an experienced man to discuss how best to bag a buffalo. To him it seemed quite simple, and I readily fell in with his suggestion to start the next day at 4 a.m. to await the arrival of buffalo at a certain water-hole. When we reached the spot the old man advised me to climb a tree about thirty yards from the water-hole, and wait eventualities. Perched in the fork of a tree about twenty-five feet from the ground, I waited for the approach of a buffalo, but to my surprise a lion arrived for a drink. While pondering over the fact of his presence, another distraction came from behind

where I was sitting. About two yards from my back was a native beehive suspended from a branch, and these little creatures obviously objected to my presence. In a few moments they took the offensive, and stung almost every exposed part of my body. The presence of the king of beasts was soon forgotten, and I hastily got my feet on *terra firma* and sprinted into the darkness, followed by a detachment of bees.

At last the welcome dawn came, and my native companion comforted me by saying: "Bwana, when we left camp you were thin, but now your face is like that of another man!" We pushed on, eager to see the longed-for buffalo. At 9 a.m. we bagged our first bull. At 11 a.m. we got a second, and by 4.30 the crowd had transported these huge carcasses into camp ready for an early start for home next morning. Thus my part of the contract was fulfilled, and after this the building of the walls went on without interruption. Full of enthusiasm, the people determined to complete their church in a few weeks, and to have a building capable of seating 550 worshippers.

It is quite impossible to express adequately the cost of such a building as this. In order that the church should not be delayed through want of money, several men left in search of work and went as far as Pemba, Zanzibar, and Mombasa, and have sent money to Samuel to defray expenses.

The church was opened amid great rejoicings on November 7, 1924, and in spite of all it had cost in time, labour, and money, 42s. was given at the opening collection to purchase a bell.

As we look into the faces of these simple-minded sons of the dark continent, and realize their faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus, we thank God for the grace given to them, and ask that we may not come behind them in sacrifice.

Up-to-date missionary news from Africa and other countries, with interesting articles on home life and customs, etc., may be found in the "Church Missionary Outlook" (2d. monthly), and "Eastward Ho!" (1d. monthly). Copies can be obtained from C.M.S. local secretaries, or direct from the Publishing Department, Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, E.C. 4.

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